

Chris Murphy

September 17th, 2023

Scripture: Matthew 25: 31-46

Sermon Title: Compassion for the Vulnerable

Prayer...

Introduction:

Our Scripture from Matthew 25 today means a lot to me because it was a source of inspiration for my Christian faith and for my own sense of calling to ministry. I have shared this with you multiple times, but this passage inspired me as a 19 years to become active in urban ministry. (Reflect on En Christo briefly)

The interesting thing about Matthew 25 is that for years I interpreted it to be a general story that spoke of praise for any person who cares for vulnerable people and a story of judgement for anyone who neglects hurting people. In recent years, I have learned from Biblical scholars that this story is really about Jesus identifying with his followers who were marginalized in his society. This is a story of both support and judgement towards gentiles. The gentiles or non-jewish people who care for the followers of Jesus are praised and those that neglect the followers of Jesus are judged. One of our mission partner couples are Bob and Gracie Ekblad. They work with migrant workers and others in the prisons and the broader community of Skagit Valley in Washington State, plus they a worldwide ministry. Bob is an ordained Presbyterian pastor and also has a PhD in New Testament. Here is what he says about our passage.

“I think that this parable is about God’s judgment of non-Jews who receive or reject followers of Jesus as they go to fulfill Jesus’ commission to make disciples, baptize and teach.

The King states “to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me.”

In Matthew Jesus consistently refers to his disciples as his brothers distinct from blood brothers/sisters (see Matt 12:48; 28:10).

A key Scripture is Matthew 10:40-42, where Jesus says to his disciples:

“The one who receives you receives me,” and “whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink... shall not lose his reward.”

Jesus also calls fellow believers to treat one another as brothers and sisters (Matt 18:15 35; 23:8) of our common Father in heaven.

Western Christians may find identifying Jesus’ followers as the hungry, thirsty, naked, foreigners, imprisoned of this parable difficult due to our distance from the ragged and persecuted state of early Christ followers and today’s persecuted believers and precarious ministry workers. Yet Christians today are marginalized, persecuted and martyred like never before in history in many places throughout the world—including inside our prison system.

Jesus’ disciples who carry on his mission were sent out in vulnerability, without money, extra clothes or even sandals (Matt 10:10), as persecuted “sheep in the midst of wolves”—a big challenge to us now. They were often strangers and even foreigners as they went from village to village and to foreign lands, fleeing persecution (Matt 10:16-23). They were dependent upon people’s hospitality (those people of peace who received them). But they were often rejected, persecuted, imprisoned and martyred (Matt 5:10-12).

In Jesus’ parable, receiving them equals receiving him—a total identification. Jesus’ identifying himself, the King with the “least of these” represents his deliberate inclusion of the humblest of his recruits who go out on mission. When

we receive a humble disciple of Jesus, Jesus says we are receiving the King, the Son of the Father himself.

May we welcome, provide for, care for and advocate for those who minister in Jesus' name. May we intercede for the persecuted church worldwide, and be inspired ourselves to join the company of Jesus' brothers and sisters—even the “least of these,” knowing that even if the world does not always receive us, Jesus has our back.”

I am grateful for Bob's wisdom in interpreting this passage.

Although this passage is particularly concerned about followers of Jesus who are vulnerable, it often inspires ministry to vulnerable people.

Nick Forest, example... Emergency Shelter and carpet stains... privilege

Our church examples... Bike Ministry- over 125 bikes per year are given out. Many to children and families living in poverty. Many to houseless folks.

Mission Partners:

- Bob and Gracie Ekblad- Tierra Nueva
- Taliilee Fiqruu with Frontier Fellowship and Light of Hope Ministries Ethiopia where she partners with her husband Urgessa Biru.
- Caroline Kurtz- Serves with Maji Development Coalition
- Erik and Maureen York serve with CRU or Campus Crusade for Christ
- Brian and Julie serve with Wycliffe Bible Translation. They came for a visit last summer.

Matthew 25 Church: (Show Video after Brief Description)

Welcome to the Matthew 25 movement, where as of today, 1,141 congregations have embraced the vision. In addition, 93 mid councils, and 63 groups have committed to helping our denomination become a more relevant presence worldwide.

A few things to ponder from this story...

- How might we have a special heart for followers of Jesus who are marginalized and suffer in poverty.
- How does this story remind us of the kingdom values of caring for vulnerable people?
- In what way are we demonstrating our heart for the vulnerable. What might God be asking of us in this area going forward.

Let us pray...

Matthew 25:31-46

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37 Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40 And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’ 41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44 Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?’ 45 Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life.”